

**PART III: FROM J.F.K.'S  
INNER CIRCLE, 'A THOUSAND DAYS'**

# *How the State Department Baffled Him*

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*This is the third of a series of articles from A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, to be published by Houghton Mifflin. Mr. Schlesinger advised Kennedy in the area of foreign policy. This is his personal account and view of Kennedy's frustrations with the State Department, which the President found an organization less than perfect as he dealt with the crises of 1961—Laos, the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin Wall.*

**T**he frustrations of the summer of 1961 brought President Kennedy's discontent with the Department of State to a climax. One muddle after another—the department's acquiescence in the Bay of Pigs, the fecklessness of its recommendations after the disaster, the apparent impossibility of developing a negotiating position for Berlin—left Kennedy with little doubt that the State Department was not yet an instrumentality fully and promptly responsive to presidential purpose.

Kennedy well understood the difficulty of converting a tradition-ridden bureaucracy into a mechanism for swift information and decision. But resistance was no less great in Defense, where Robert McNamara was plainly making progress in annexing the Pentagon to the U.S. government. Other departments provided quick answers and quick action. It

was a constant puzzle to Kennedy that the State Department remained so formless and impenetrable. He would come back to the mansion at night and remark to Jacqueline, "Damn it, [McGeorge] Bundy and I get more done in one day at the White House than they do in six months in the State Department." Giving State an instruction, he would remark, was like dropping it in the dead-letter box. "The State Department is a bowl of jelly," he told TIME's Hugh Sidey in the summer of 1961. "It's got all those people over there who are constantly smiling. I think we need to smile less and be tougher."

Kennedy had come to the Presidency determined to make the Department of State the central point, below the President himself, in the conduct of foreign affairs. In embarking on this course, he was influenced not